"I think if Dr. Dobson were alive 225 years ago, he would have been one of the founding fathers."

REV. TED HAGGARD – senior pastor, New Life Church

Dobson's impact widely felt

By **PAUL ASAY**
THE GAZETTE

U.S. Protestant pastors give high marks for trust, influence

When the nation's pastors look for leadership, many turn an eye toward Colorado Springs and James Dobson.

Dobson, founder and chairman of the Colorado Springs-based Christian organization Focus on the Family, wields substantial influence in U.S. Protestant churches today, according to a study by The Barna Group, an evangelical research company based in Ventura, Calif.

Barna has conducted research on Christian and evangelical subcultures for more than 20 years, and its studies are widely used by churches and para-church organizations.

Of the 614 Protestant senior pastors polled nationally by random sample, 11 percent named Dobson as a major influence in church life — one of four people named by more than 10 percent of the clergy.

When it comes to trust, Dobson ranked higher. Of the pastors polled, 20 percent listed the Focus leader as the "most trusted spokesperson for Christianity."

The study, according to Barna, has a 4.1-percent margin of error.

Longtime evangelist the Rev. Billy Graham topped both lists by a sizable margin: 34 percent of pastors said he was one of the church's most influential figures, and 58 percent said he was Christianity's most trusted spokesman.

In terms of influence, Graham was followed by Rick Warren, author of the best-selling book "The Purpose Driven Life" (26 percent), and President Bush (14 percent).

Some local pastors say that Christian leaders trust Dobson because of his work with families and vocal opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. He's a man of principle, they say.

"I think if Dr. Dobson were alive 225 years ago, he would have been one of the founding fathers," said the Rev. Ted Haggard, senior pastor for New Life Church. "He's thoughtful, he's courageous, and he is right. People trust him."

"Dr. Dobson reflects the mainstream values of evangelical Christians," said the Rev. Armin Sommer, senior pastor for Pulpit Rock Church. "Quite simply, he articulates what they, in their heart of hearts, believe."

"I think he's personally believable," said the Rev. Jim White, senior pastor for First Congregational Church-United Church of Christ downtown and a frequent critic of the politics of Focus on the Family. "I like Jim a lot, because he's such a friendly guy. You don't build an organization like that without a personal projection of truthfulness."

Dobson is often associated with conservative religious activism and has been a tireless advocate for "marriage preservation" laws across the country. Some say he was instrumental in rallying evangelicals to vote this past presidential election, and most of those evangelicals voted for Bush.

But many Christians know him more for his work as child psychologist and author. Focus on the Family offers books, videos and advice on a range of family-oriented problems, from bed-wetting to adolescent angst.

Whether pastors respect him more for his political influence or work with the family was not explored in the poll.

Pastors hailing from more liberal mainline denominations were almost as supportive of Dobson as evangelical pastors were. When mainline pastors were isolated in the polling data, Dobson still finished fourth in terms of influence and third when it came to trust.

Two other religious figures often associated with political activism — Pat Robertson and the Rev. Jerry Falwell — finished far lower than Dobson in Barna's study.

Neither was listed as one of the church's top 10 most influential figures. When pastors were asked about the most trustworthy Christian spokesman, 6 percent did name Falwell, which put the Moral Majority founder in sixth place.

"Trust is a funny thing," Sommer said. "Trust is often a function of both familiarity and agreement. When there are people who we are familiar with and who we largely agree with, we tend to trust them."

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Lawmakers from both parties pushed for two bills Monday that would save taxpayer money and help Medicaid patients.

"It is immoral to cut back in health care if we can find savings in Medicaid," said Sen. Bob Hagedorn, D-Aurora.

2005 General Assembly

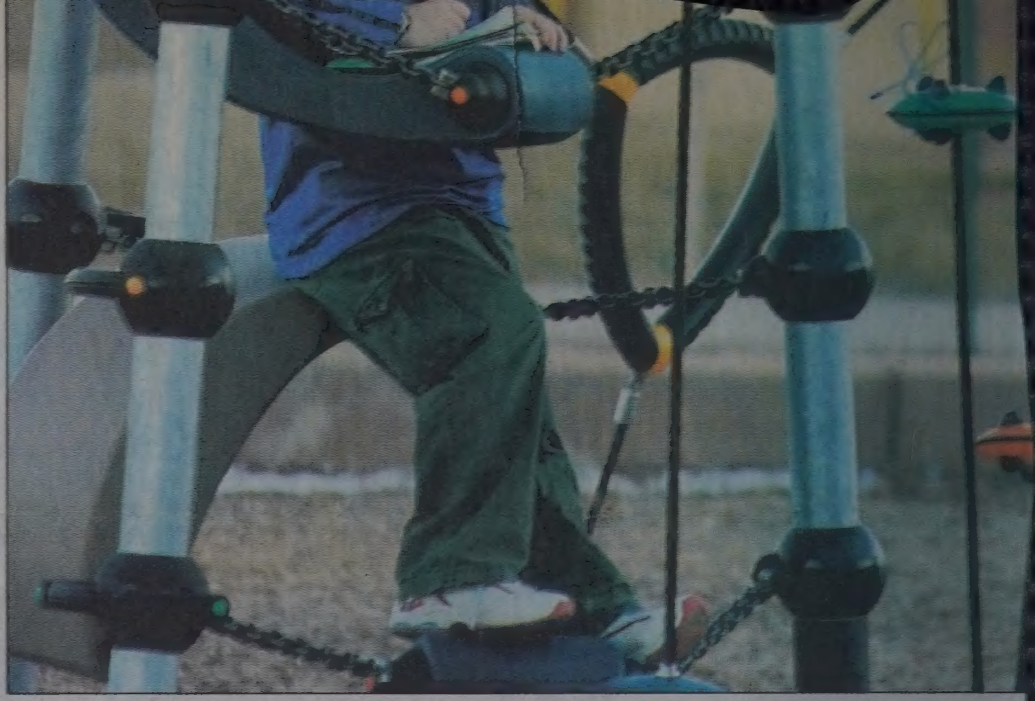
Senate Bill 22, sponsored by Sen. Steve Johnson, R-Fort Collins, would create a preferred drug list for Colorado's Medicaid program. The suggested drugs would be generic and cheaper than brand-name drugs.

The goals of Senate Bill 22 are to save taxpayer money, prevent service cuts in Medicaid and provide more information to patients about the drugs that are prescribed to them, Johnson said. Colorado is one of six states that does not have a preferred drug list, he said.

Johnson carried similar legislation last year that would have saved the state an estimated $4 million, but it was defeated in committee.

A second bill, to be introduced this week, would allow the state to join eight other states in a purchasing pool. The state would be able to buy drugs cheaper, saving millions of dollars.

Last year, the state auditor found that Colorado paid $500,000 for unauthorized drugs and didn't take advantage of price limits that could



Fourth-grader Tyler Hassler had the day off from school Monday for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, but he found time to do his homework. His dad told him he could hang out work done first.

Local Bush backers ready for

By ED SEALOVER
THE GAZETTE

Most people take less time planning their weddings than Peggy Littleton has used to prepare for her trip to President Bush's inauguration this week.

Four years ago, Littleton and two friends swore that if they could help get the president re-elected, they wouldn't miss the pomp and parties that followed.

They stumped for him in 2004, represented Colorado at the Republican National Convention and then, after Bush won, got their hotel room booked early.

Now it's grand old party time.

Littleton, a Colorado Springs educatio ant, has spent the past week picking out a the inaugural ball, getting her nails manic buying "all the bling-bling to go with it."

She and several dozen other area Busl will have the time of their lives Thursday the president begin his second and final te Oval Office.

"Four years ago, we said, 'OK, here it i him elected and we don't get to join in a ty,'" said Littleton, a state board of educat ber. "I'm really excited. ... It's going to b fun."